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THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

ON THE ALBANY ROAD

BY

GEORGE SHELDON

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Reprinted from the
New England Magazine
September, 1898



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Sheldon, George, 1818-1916.

The little brown house on the Albany road, by George Sheldon ... [Boston?], 1898.

cover-title, 19 p. illus. 24cm.

"Reprinted from the New England magazine, September, 1898."

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The Little Brown House on the Albany Road.

By George Sheldon.

THE transformation is wonderful; it seems almost a work of magic.

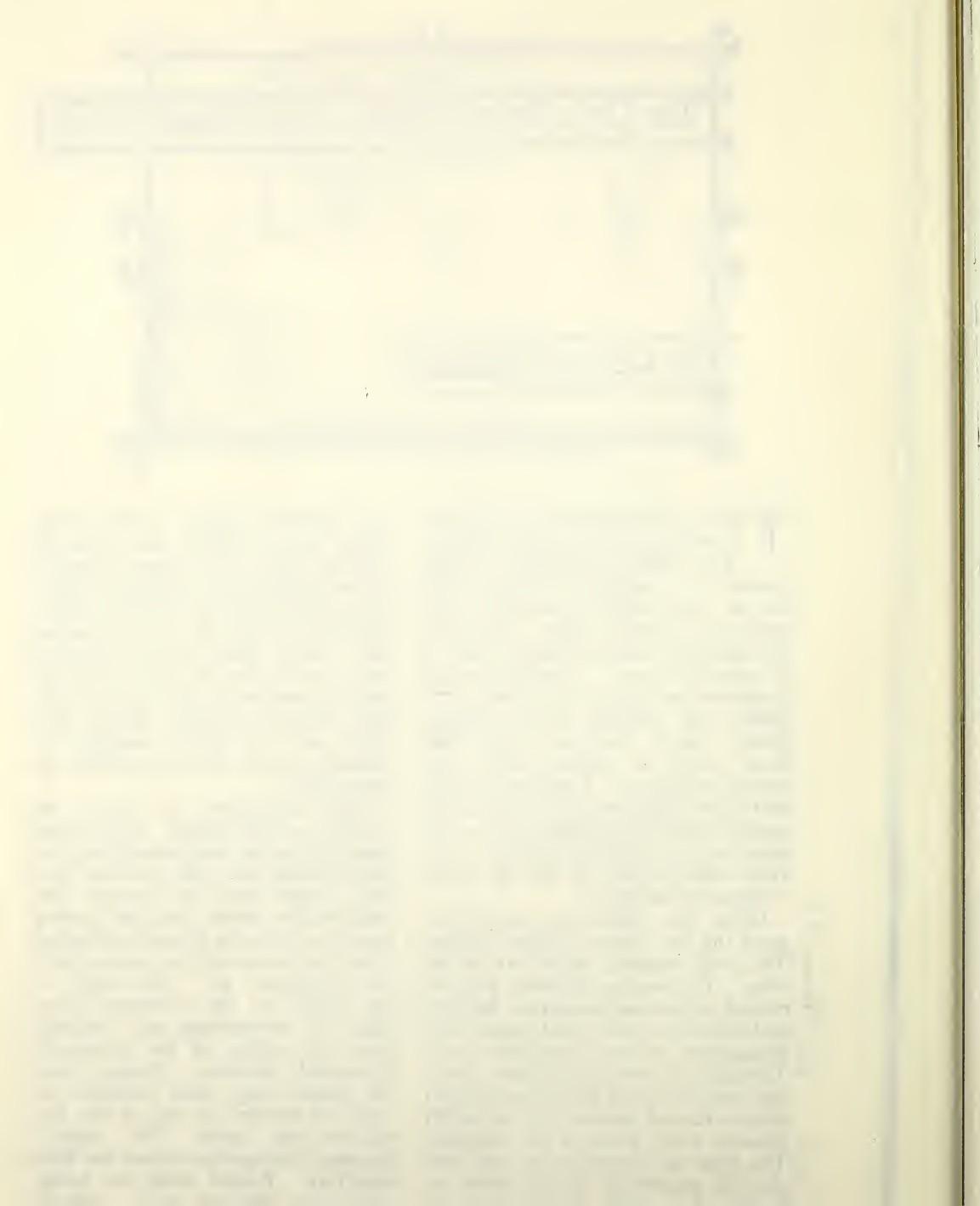
The story of Aladdin's Lamp cannot be wholly a myth. The sky no longer looks through a gaping roof to a yawning cellar. The rain, the hail and snow no longer enter as if welcome guests. Warp and woof, fashioned and dyed in the Orient, supplants the rubbish on the rotting floors. Stuffs, rich and rare, flow from walls no longer black with smoke and grinie. Festoons, rivaling in texture those from the loom of the spider, which they displace, show artistic taste and delight the eye. Pictures and works of art fill every "coigne of vantage."

Gone the staggering partitions; gone the low, brown, ragged ceiling. The long slanting rafters are in full view. The massive chimney and the rotund oven stand displayed. Kitchen and bedroom, pantry and parlor have disappeared in one generous whole. Through the narrow windows, inviting streams of soft light from elegant lamps are sent abroad into the night towards every point of the compass. The genii of the place preside over cheerful hospitality within, where so lately a sad spirit of seclusion and gloomy content held sway. No con-

trast could be greater. In the yellow light, thrown fitfully out from the burning logs in the huge fireplace, graceful forms flit to and fro, appearing and disappearing with the fantastic shadows upon the red wainscoted wall. Sweet music is heard, soft and weird, as if afar off, and stories are told of witches urging their broomstick steeds across the stormy midnight sky to festive meetings in uncanny nooks with still more uncanny folk.

The Antiquary sits upon the hearthstone and muses. The change seems so unreal and bewildering; he cannot draw the line, and the past will mingle with the present. He watches the sparks and the curling smoke as they rise towards boundless space, and voices of the unseen catch his responsive ear. He hears, in the mouth of the cavernous oven hard by, whisperings and wailings from the spirits of the past,—the household familiars. Driven from old haunts they have crowded the oven for shelter, as one of the few undesecrated spots. "We claim," they say, "recognition before our final departure. Behold what we bring, and record what you will." And the Antiquary sees a shadowy procession

Men & Money 33

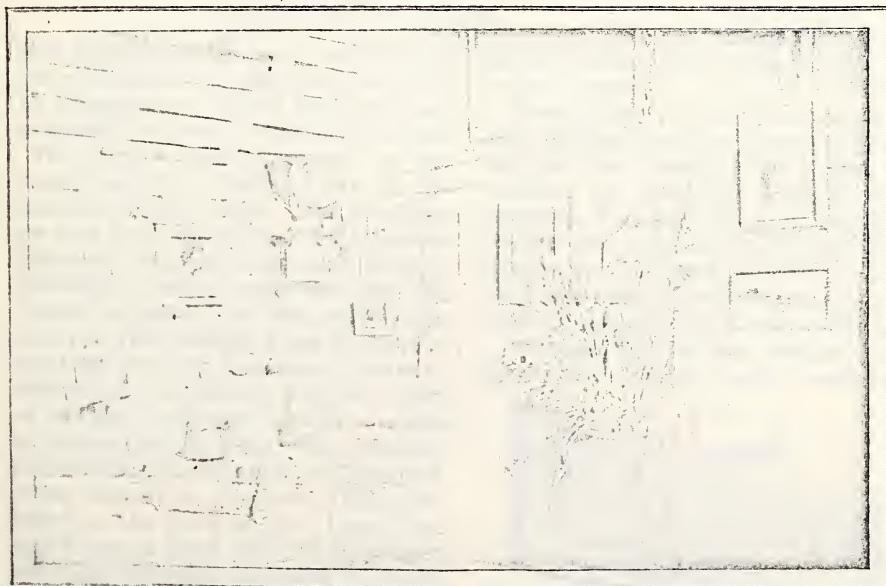


THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

issuing forth from the mouth of the oven and bearing open scrolls on which are pictured events centering around this old hearthstone,—plain matters of fact, scenes of joy, scenes of sorrowing, of triumph, of despair, details of everyday life and duty in the far off past. Shadowy and dim, growing brighter and clearer, the vision passes upward, disappearing with the smoke and the sparks. Thus impelled, the Antiquary records in homely phrase the result of his musings in the little brown cottage by the old Albany road on the evening of its dedication to a new purpose and to a

to his successor in office, Rev. Jonathan Ashley.

As in later days, so in the olden time, leased lands fared hardly. Every thing possible was taken from it, and little or nothing returned. In 1759, after seventy years of this kind of treatment, the selectmen in a petition to the General Court say, "the soil is poor and barren for want of manure," also that the land is of less benefit to the minister than its value in money would be, and they ask leave of the General Court to sell it. There was, however, another reason for this action, and, it may be, the main one.

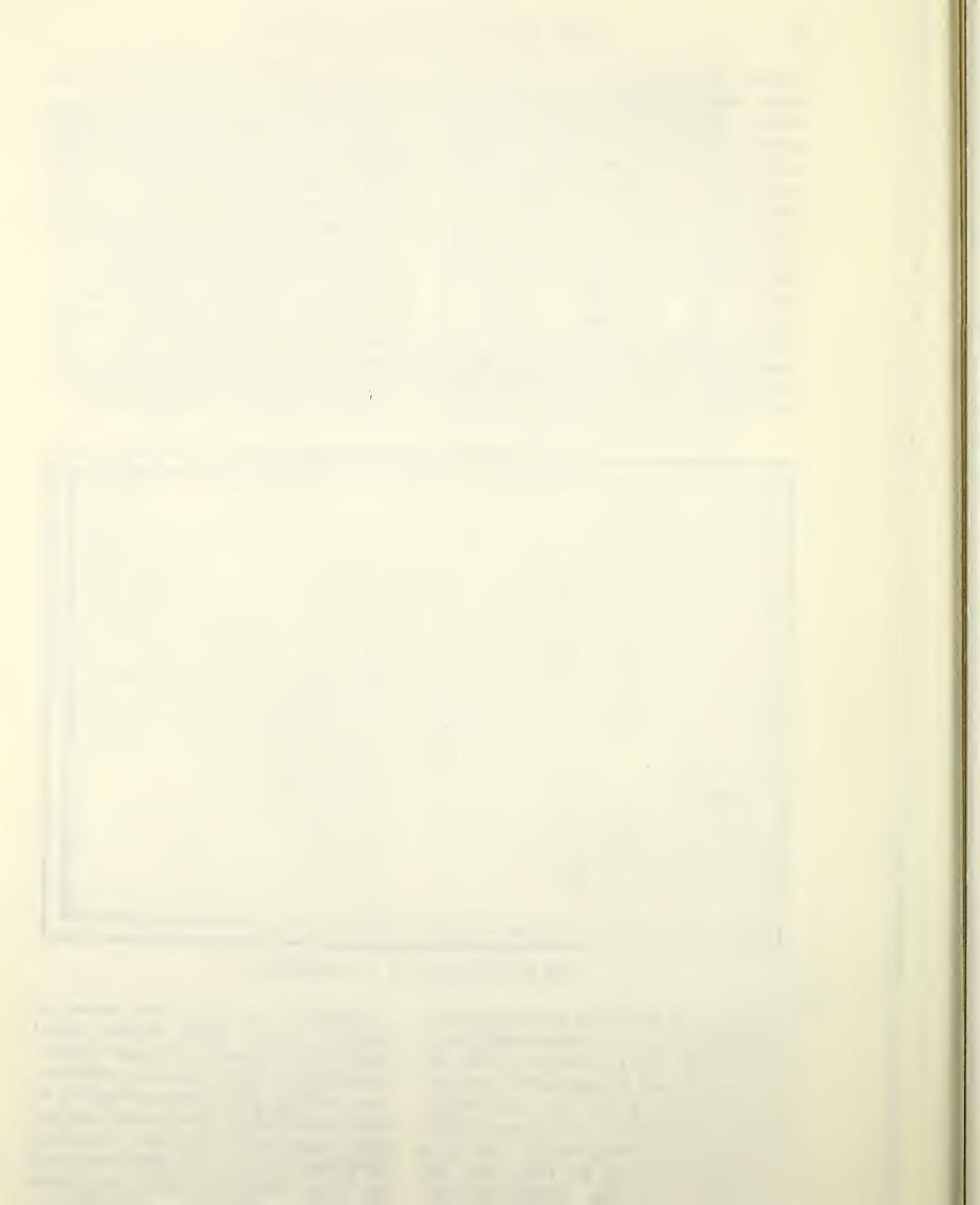


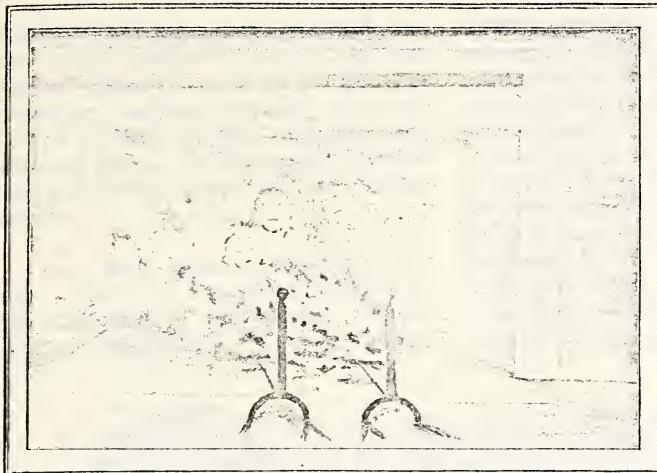
"THE TRANSFORMATION IS WONDERFUL."

new lease of life by its new occupants.

The little brown house stands on a part of the tract which in 1686 the "Proprietors of Pocumtuck" "sequestered for the use of the ministry of Deerfield forever." In this service the lot was leased from year to year by a committee chosen by the town, the income of it going, during his lifetime, to the Rev. John Williams, our "Beloved Captive," and afterwards

Deerfield was then the center of business for a large region round about, and craftsmen of many kinds—"tradesmen" they were then called—were seeking places here on which to build shops where they could exercise their handicrafts. Suitable locations were hard to get, and the ministerial lot, lying along the Albany road, was wanted for that purpose. In 1760, under the authority of an act of the colo-





THE HOUSEHOLD FAMILIARS.

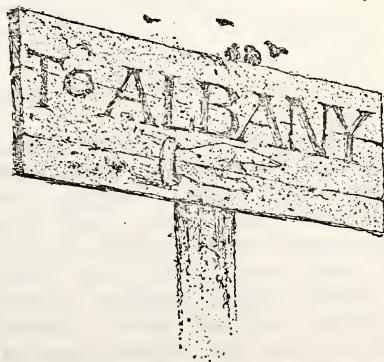
nial legislature; this tract was cut up into small lots by the town and sold to tradesmen. It had been laid out originally between the house lot of the "Worshipful John Pynchon" on the south and the Middle Lane to the meadows on the north. The Pynchon lot was later the home of Mehuman Hinsdale, the first white man born in Deerfield, "twice captivated by the Indian salvages," as his grave-stone testifies. The Middle Lane became in due time the high road from Northern Hampshire to Albany and the scene of military operations against Canada by the way of the lakes. The lots sold to tradesmen faced north on this road. Many now living have seen the guide-board at the head of the "Lane," on which was a hand with the forefinger pointing westward, directing the traveler "To Albany."

Very soon this poor and barren land bore abundant fruit. Buildings sprang up, and new sounds were heard all along its border. The clang of the anvil and the blast from the bellows of Armorer Bull answered to the hissing of the flip iron and tap of the toddy-stick of his neighbor, Landlord Saxton. The ting-a-ling of Silversmith Parker more than held its own with the muffled thud from the loom of Elizabeth Amsden the weaver, and

the soft music of the flickering bowstring of Felt-maker Hamilton, as it rained blows on the fine fur of the beaver, muskrat or raccoon. The mallet of Hitchcock, the hatter, responded feebly in a dull monotone to the sharp speaking strokes of the hammer on the lap-stone of David Saxton, as he sat at the east window of the

kitchen in the little cottage on the old colonial road.

Should the traveler from the Hudson, coming over the Hoosac Mountain to the Connecticut Valley, be waylaid by prowling Indians, and stripped of all his effects, he could be refitted and refreshed within the borders of the old ministerial lot. Had his horse been spared, it could be fed, shod, furnished with a new saddle and a portmanteau; or had fortune been more cruel, had the horse been taken,



the traveler could be provided with a new one from the choice stud of Breeder Saxton. He could buy a hat, shoes, cloth for a coat, and a watch for his fob. He could procure a sword, musket, or a pair of pistols, and, after

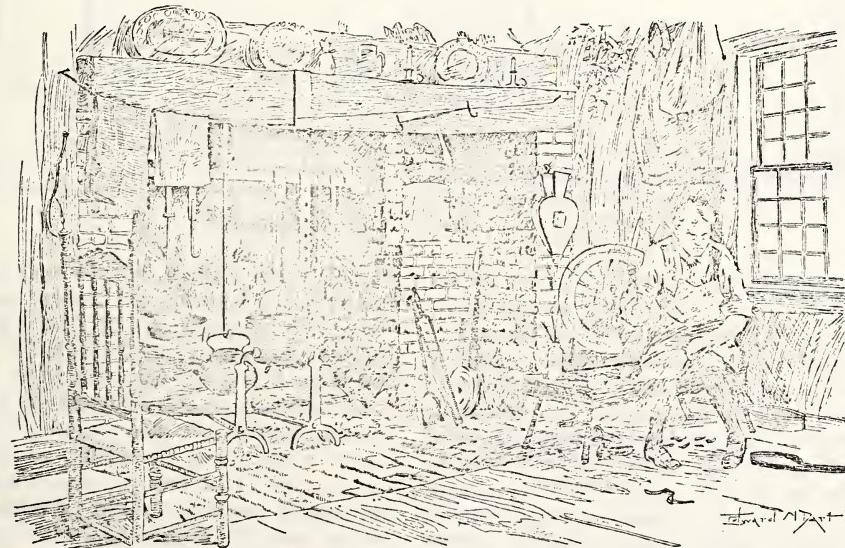


a mug of hot flip and a bountiful dinner with Landlord Saxton, the de-spoiled stranger could go on his way rejoicing, having obtained all these things without money, although not without price. In those days credit was universally given and was rarely abused.

Come back again to the little cottage where, by the great window in the east end of the kitchen, David Saxton hammered the oak tanned

called upon by a neighbor to act as a referee on some question in dispute. Springing up suddenly, letting his lap-stone and hammer tumble to the floor, he exclaimed, while whisking off his leather apron with alacrity: "What a cussed thing it is to be a man of judgment!" Nevertheless, this son of Crispin went his way to exercise this judgment for the benefit of his fellows with real content.

Assuming kitchen, dining room and shop to be one, while the husband and

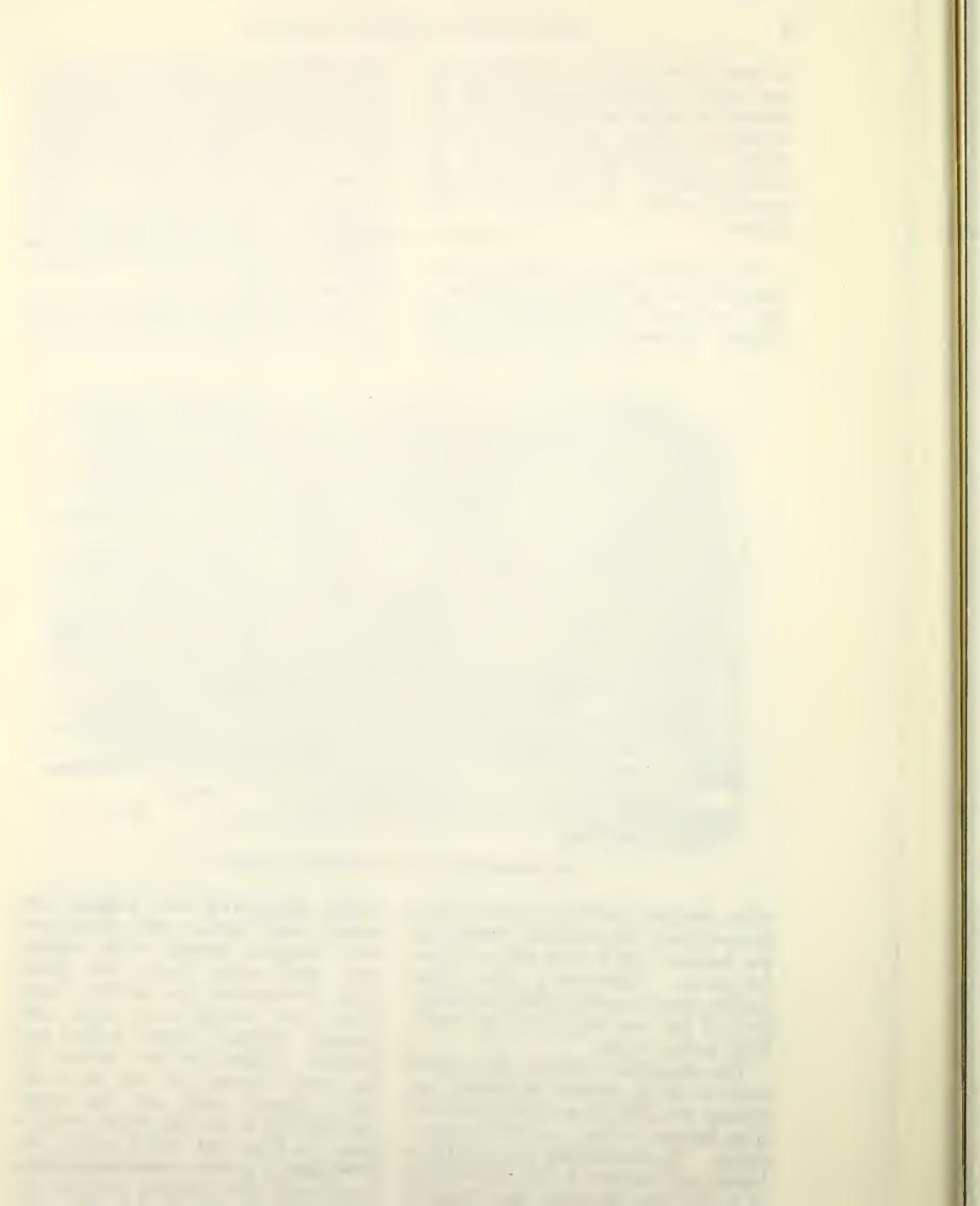


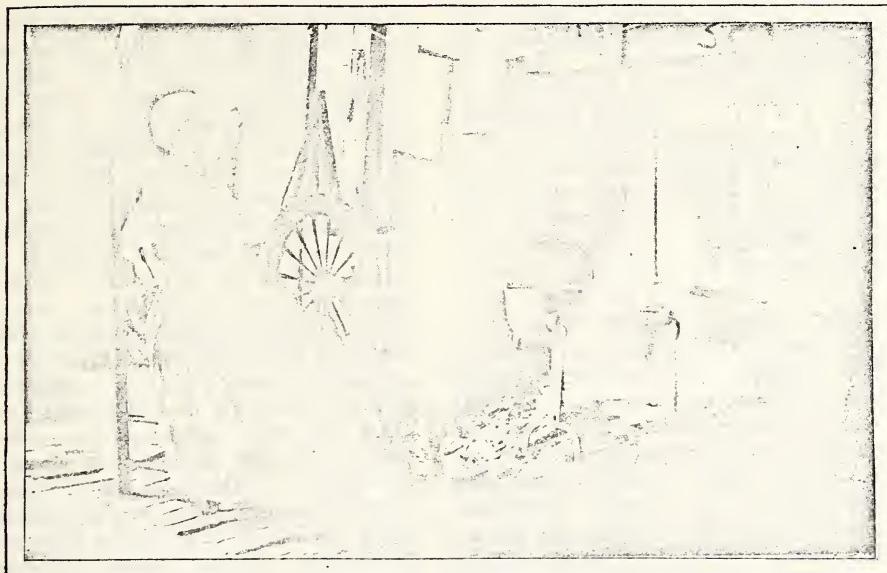
"HE HAMMERED AND PEGGED AND SEWED."

soles, and with well-waxed home-spun thread closed the seams of honest upper leather, with honest toil and good judgment. Concerning this latter quality there is a story told characteristic of the man and bringing him a little nearer to us.

The shoemaker was so often called upon to act as referee, arbitrator, appraiser, etc., that he must be pardoned if he became a little vain of his reputation. He thoroughly enjoyed these labors and honors; a little grumbling at the burden he might have thought increased his importance. One day, while at work on his bench, he was

father hammered and pegged and sewed, and sewed and hammered and pegged, month after month and year after year, his good wife, Bathsheba, was always nigh. Here she baked, and here she brewed, washed, ironed, boiled and stewed. From his low bench by the east window one day in every week David could see the roaring red fire in the big brick oven in front of him, and could watch the fierce flames as they curled to its dome and darted their forked tongues towards him, only to be caught at its very mouth by the spirits of the air





"THE BUZZING WHEEL SANG A LULLABY."

and sent swiftly up the flue. David could watch his spouse, as with her long iron peel she removed the glowing coals when the oven had reached the right pitch of heat, and with her husk-broom, wetted as need be in a pail of water on the hearth, swept clean of ashes the oven floor. And when the oven door had been put up a suitable time to "draw down the heat," he could see Bathsheba as she deftly tossed from her light wooden peel, into the farthermost depths of the heated cavern, the squat loaves of rye and Indian bread. This peel was as white as river sand and "elbow grease" could make it. In due time David could snuff the rich savor of the brown beauties as they were taken out on the peel and piled upon the table near him, a good week's supply for the family. The front part of the oven may have been filled in with pumpkin pies, or tarts with the initials of the children cut in pie crust on the top, or, on state occasions, it may be with a spare rib of pork, or a pigling entire, a haunch of venison, a wild goose, or a turkey. Nothing came

amiss to this great, warm-hearted friend of the family.

But the oven had a rival in the attentions and affection of David. Close by, at its right shoulder, was a capacious fireplace, with its generous back log, fore log and top log, urging up the climbing flame, every day, and in season all day long. As the mouth of the oven was closed six days out of seven, it had a poor chance against the loquacious fireplace, which by a side glance came full in view from the shoemaker's bench. Besides, there was the great iron dinner pot, which the swinging crane held out daily over the very heart of the merry fire, that welcomed it with great glee, laughing and dancing under and about it, embracing it with its red arms, and touching its very lid with its curling lips of flame. The stolid iron, yielding to its ardent friend, was forced to acknowledge its subtle influence, and soon David could hear the contents of the big-bellied pot merrily gurgling and babbling of the jolly time they were all having, although in hot water together.

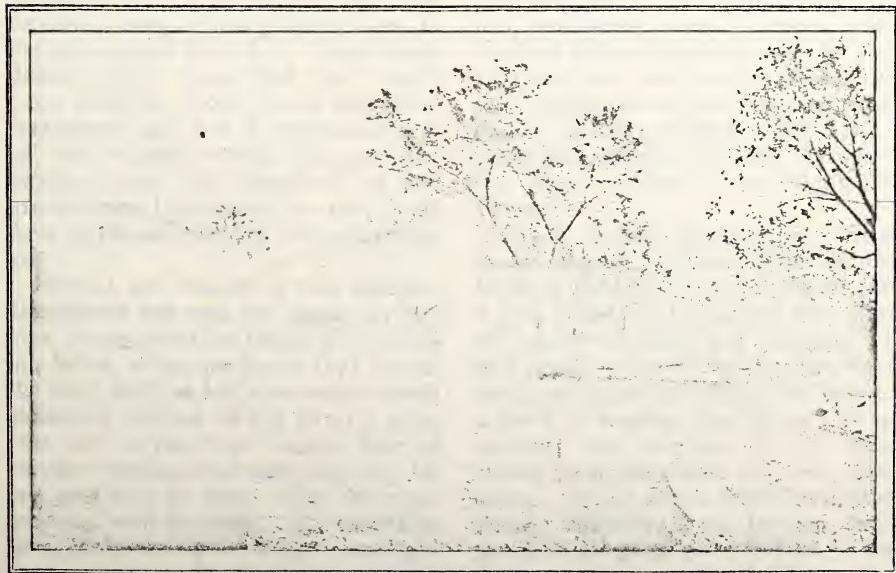


So the "pot was biled" every day in the week. But the marvel and the mystery of it all—the leaping flame, the solid iron, the hissing steam! David was no philosopher—the shoemaker should stick to his last. He was no Watt, to note the tilting lid. He was no chemist, to analyze effects. He had a good appetite, engendered by healthy toil and a clear conscience. He could do ample justice to the contents of the pot, when piled upon the pewter platter, as the style on the sun dial lined with the meridian. But he never stopped—why should he—or we either for that matter—to speculate upon the daily miracle wrought by the loving fire spirit of the household. David saw Bathsheba put into the mouth of that pot cold water, and then beef, pork, cabbage, carrots, parsnips, turnips, all cold and indigestible; later he had stopped with upraised hammer, while pegging a sole, to see her swing out the crane and souse into the seething mass a bag of Indian pudding, resuming his labor when this was safely accomplished. And daily he had seen:

these crude materials come out smoking, luscious food, fit to "set before the king." Therefore the oven got the worst of it in the rivalry for the affections of David.

If the oven had thought about it, if the fireplace had thought about it, if David had thought about it,—which none of them did,—they might have drawn this moral: Be faithful and useful not only one day in seven, but every day of the week.

So by the great east window, where the morning sun shone full upon him, David hammered and pegged and stitched, and pegged and stitched and hammered, to secure the understanding of his customers and bread for his wife and children; while Goodwife Bathsheba baked and brewed and ironed and carded and spun, the hum of the wheel in harmony with the sound of the hammer. From flax taken in barter for the products of David's labor, she spun and twisted the honest thread with which his seams were closed; and while her foot pressed the treadle, and her busy fingers gauged and guided the slender



GOD'S ACRE.



thread her buzzing wheel sang a lullaby, and David with his stirruped foot gave an occasional jog to the cradle. For amid all the sights and sounds of this life of mutual industry and helpfulness, children came to be cared for and loved, and, alas, to be mourned for. Was David seen with arms extended as he had drawn home the last stitch of a seam, gazing abstractedly at the empty cradle by the

guish between the fresh scar on the bosom of mother earth and those partly healed by the kindly ministrations of time, and she sadly compared them to the scars in her own bosom; only on these time had worked more slowly and across these only shadows fell.

It may have been to remove his wife from a prospect so saddening that David before the birth of another babe, or before the brown had changed to green on the newest mound, left the little cottage and sought with Bathsheba at New Salem that comfort denied their parental longings here. In their new home the fates were kinder, and children were born and lived to cheer their declining years.

On the west side of our Old Burying Ground, where the gentle breezes come up from the murmuring Pocumtuck, where the aspen reaches out

its kindly hands in benediction over the spot, and its restless leaves whisper, perchance, tales of bygone years, the four little mounds lie, side by side, as of old; but now there are two larger and longer ones; and on the moss-grown stones standing at the head of these are recorded the last events in the lives of David and Bathsheba Saxton.

From David Saxton the brown house passed to David Hoyt, Senior. If Hoyt then took up his abode here, it was doubtless to pursue his calling of "maker of wiggs and foretops." In this polite generation, the owners of bald heads are told that this defect is a mark of wisdom and honor; consequently they are apt to be rather proud than otherwise of their sterile pates. Not so in the time of which we speak. Whether it was incense to the goddess Hygeia, or a tribute to the goddess of fashion, the bald head was carefully covered; the first ravages by



"THEY REST TOGETHER."

oven door, we may be sure his thoughts were away among the little mounds, more or less grassed over, in the graveyard hard by. Four times during eight years had that cradle been robbed. Four times the dread messenger had led a procession out of the square room beyond the kitchen, over the threshold of the low-browed front door, to the God's Acre at the west end of the ministerial lot.

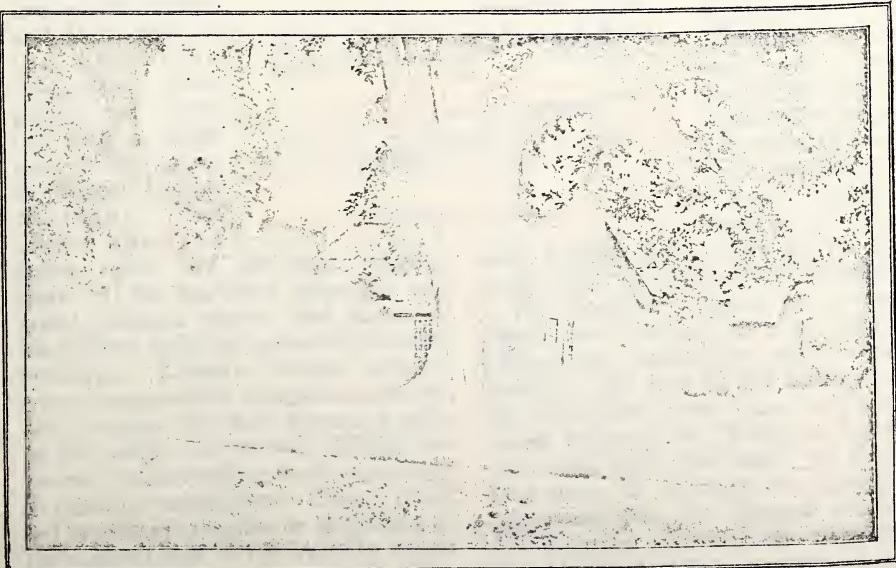
Should we wonder if the stricken Bathsheba put salt for sugar in her pies, or seasoned her bread with scalding brine, when we know that across the level field, in full view of the small shuttered window of her pantry, slept that city of the dead, where four of her five darlings had been laid, one by one and side by side? For she must work as well as weep. By straining her eyes, as the bright sunlight streamed across the little mounds, the mother fancied that she could distin-



a foretop or by the side hair combed up and braided on the top; total devastation by a full wig. Women rarely needed anything more than a foretop. Engaged in a business like this, himself well on in years, we can easily imagine the class of customers and their friends that gathered about the hearthstone of the wig-maker, sipping their flip or cider and telling stories, as men of their age are fond of doing. The host doubtless often told how his father, when a boy, was captured at the sacking of the town in 1704; how, being carried to Canada, he lived with his Indian master at Lorette; how William, son of Governor Dudley, then on a mission to Vaudreuil, governor of Canada, saw him on the streets at Quebec one day, and how the envoy jingled twenty silver dollars in the face of his Indian owner and offered to exchange them for the boy; how the savage could not withstand the temptation, and the captive boy was made free; how the Indian, soon repenting of his bargain, came back with the dumb dollars for the live boy who could hunt and fish.

Too late, for Dudley, foreseeing this, had hurried Jonathan on board an English vessel, and the Indian went away lamenting. David had doubtless often seen this Indian, for in times of peace he used to come to Deerfield to see the lost boy, of whom he was very fond. Jonathan, says tradition, showed great affection for the savage and declared his sojourn in Canada to be the happiest part of his life. Of course, David talked freely on this topic; but there is reason to think he was fond of silence. He believed silence to be kingly, if not golden, and so he had married as a second wife Silence King. A less sentimental reason — she, too, being a "maker of foretops" — may have had its bearing on the case. Why not? Love and thrift are good everyday yoke mates; — blossom and fruit. Thriftless love is too unsubstantial for use.

David's stories would doubtless be matched by others. Deacon Jeremiah Nims, son of that John who was taken and carried to Canada from near Frary's Bridge in 1703, could tell of



"IT NESTLED SO SNUGLY UNDER THE GREAT ELM TREE."



his father's adventures while in Canadian captivity and his terrible experiences when, with three other young men, he escaped and made his way home through the wilderness, where he arrived in a demented state and nearly famished. John Williams, Nathan Catlin, John Sheldon could each relate tales of Indian warfare and captivity, heard from their grandfathers; while his next door neighbor, Justin Hitchcock, could talk of a later war, and thrill his hearers with his own experiences while responding to the Lexington alarm. He could tell how the inspiring notes of his fife renewed the tired muscle of the Deerfield Minute Men under Captain Locke on their march to meet the enraged British lion in Boston. The fifer could also relate as an eye witness the particulars and the result of the disastrous campaign of Burgoyne, and could tell with a relish how the company of Captain Joseph Stebbins and others swooped down upon the personal baggage train of the harassed general, and could perhaps show, like some of his fellows, trophies harvested on that occasion. Captain Joseph himself, whose house stood in sight across lots, could repeat the well known pranks of the mobs he led in visiting the tories and enforcing their signatures to patriotic resolutions. Others could tell stories of witches, or of ghosts, as the current talk of the evening might run. Meanwhile, the light from the blazing hickory logs was casting

shadows of the group around the hearthstone upon the green baize curtains of the turn-up bed and the red wainscoted walls, where they appeared huge and weird, like the ghosts of restless giants; — pictures quite in keeping with the tales that were told.

About a century ago, Epaphras Hoyt, son of David and Silence, became the owner and occupant of the cottage, which then retained its original external form, to which recent

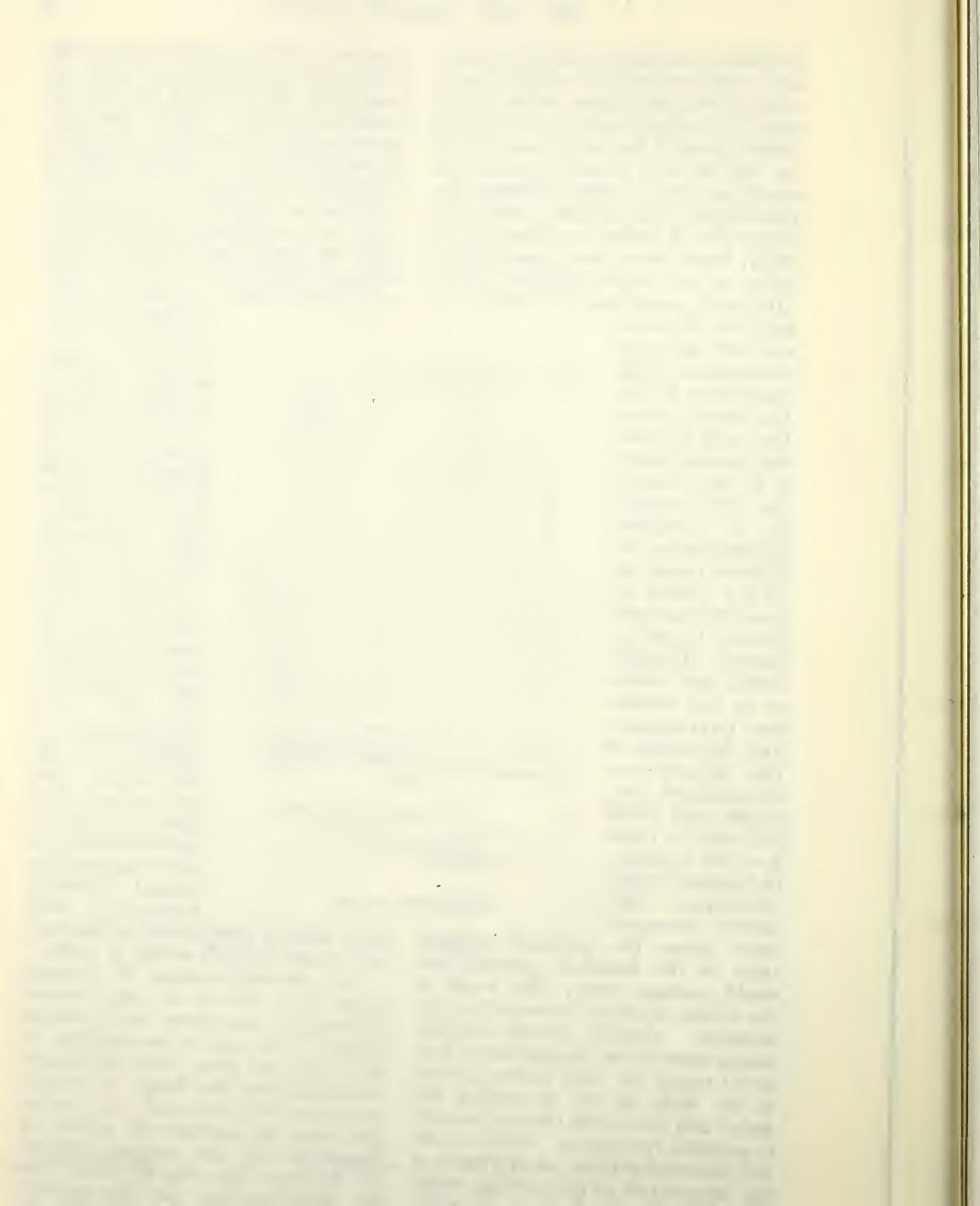
changes have restored it. Although a young man, Hoyt brought with him a valued experience, and the atmosphere as well as the form of the house was gradually changed. Hoyt was a man of genius, whom science had marked for its own, and he gathered here all kindred elements in the town. His Experience, or "Spiddy," as she was called, bore fruit from time to time, and wider accommodations were required; so "Aunt Spiddy's bedroom" and

back kitchen were added in the rear, and "Aunt Spiddy's stoop" in front.

The favorite studies of General Hoyt were the art of war, natural philosophy, astronomy and colonial history. He was in the meridian of life when the great wars of Europe which followed the "Reign of Terror" convulsed that continent. As a military man, he watched the course of Napoleon with the deepest interest. He followed him step by step, over the Alps into Italy, over the sea into Egypt, over the Pyrenees into Spain,



DOORSTONE TALES.

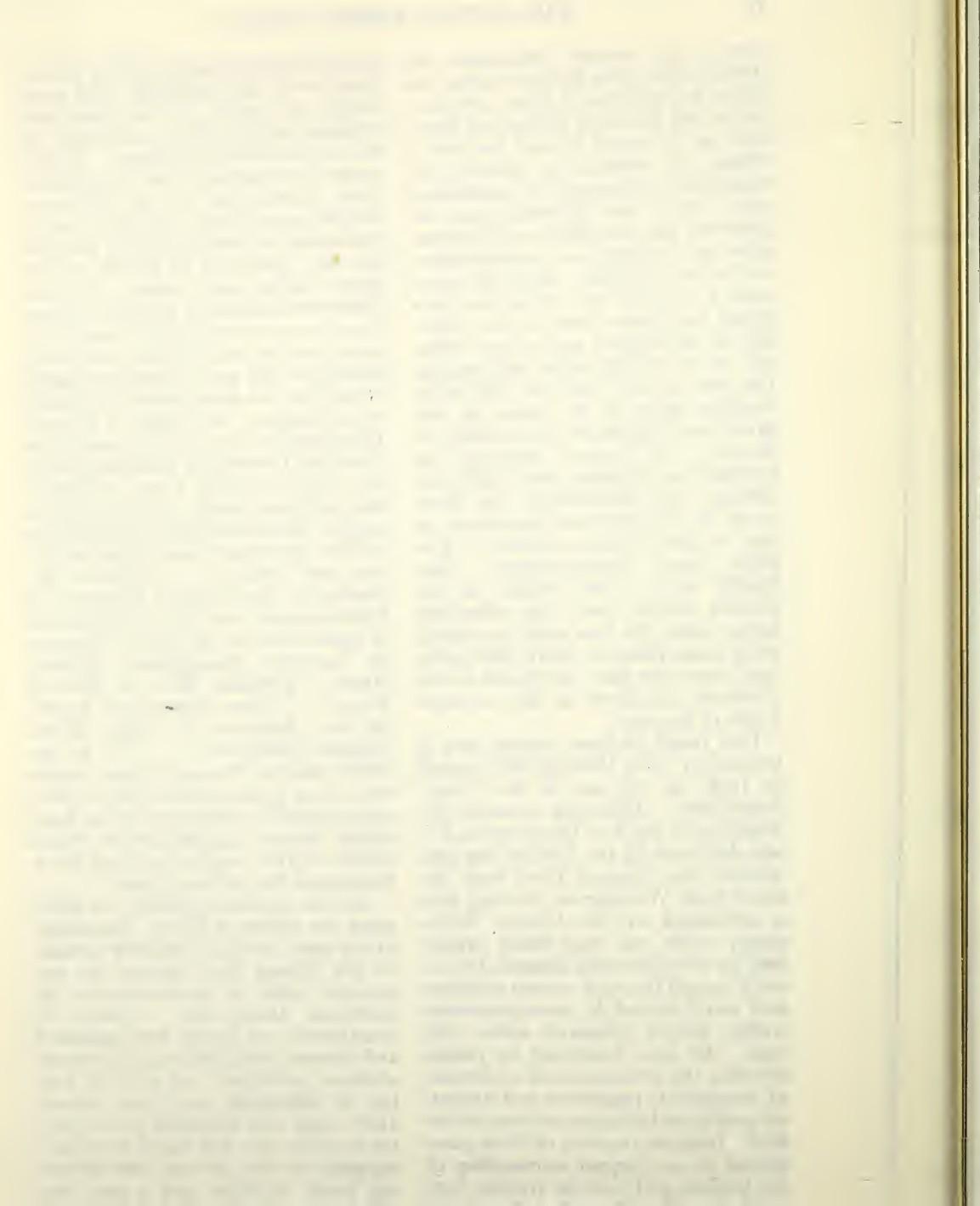


where his cannon disturbed the "burial of Sir John Moore;" across the Rhine to the fields of Ulna and Austerlitz and Jena and Eylau and Wagram, as he raged to and fro like a demon of destruction, ignoring or tearing into tatters, all the established rules which had hitherto been the guide for the movements of European arms on the march or in manœuvres on the field of battle. Here was a rare chance to study the art of war on a grand scale from a new master. Hoyt, like an enthusiastic patriot, gave himself up to it with ardor and success. Can we not see him with the poker drawing plans in the ashes on this great hearth, plans of recent battles to illustrate his theme, showing his friends how Napoleon had beaten the Italians, the Austrians or the Russians, by this or that movement, at this or that critical moment? The point once demonstrated, Aunt Spiddy with a few whisks of her birchen broom sent the offending ashes under the fore stick, sweeping aside these plans no more effectually than some new burst of genius in the Corsican did those of the crowned heads of Europe.

One result of these studies was a treatise on "The Military Art," issued in 1798, for the use of the United States army. This work attracted the attention of the first President, and it was doubtless by the light of our east window that General Hoyt read the letter from Washington offering him a command in the United States army, which was then being organized for a conflict with France. Hoyt's work passed through several editions, and was followed by more elaborate works, largely prepared under this roof. All were illustrated by plates, showing the formation and evolutions of companies, regiments and armies, on parade and in active service on the field. Imagine sketches of these plans pinned up on the red wainscoting of the kitchen, and note the trouble they gave Aunt Spiddy, when the frolicsome wind from the open window sent

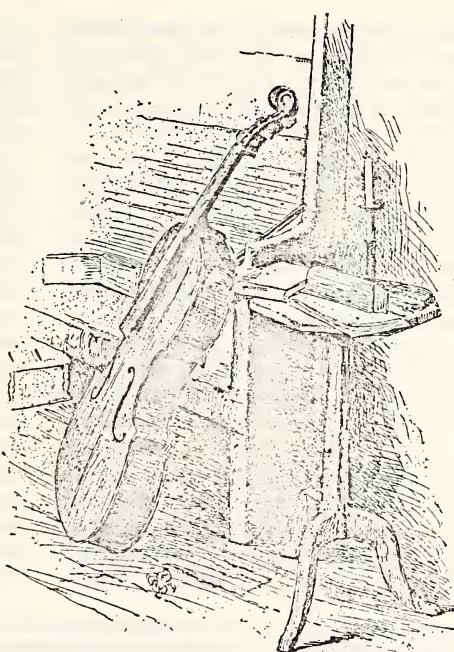
them scurrying over her nicely sanded floor, with the possibility that some might be caught in the draft and whisked with the flame and smoke up the wide-throated chimney. Hoyt's reason for declining the commission from Washington we do not know. We do know that it was not a lack of patriotism or waning love of the military art. Probably he felt the call for home duties more urgent. He was Inspector-General of the state troops. Trouble was brewing with Great Britain as well as with France, and many feared that the great Corsican himself would turn his arms across the waters to our shores. The hand of General Hoyt may be seen in the action of the Board of Trustees of Deerfield Academy, when in 1806 a new professorship was established. It was for teaching the "Theoretical and Practical Art of War viz:—tactics according to Stubben and Dundas . . . Practical Geometry on the Ground; Elements of Fortifications, and the Construction of small works in the Field; Elements of Gunnery; Topography; Military History; Partisan War, or War of Posts; . . . These subjects will be under the direction of Major Hoyt, Brigade Inspector. . . . It is believed that the Present Critical Situation of our Country will induce young men to qualify themselves for an honorable defence against every hostile attack on their native land and lay a foundation for military Glory."

But our genius sacrificed not alone upon the shrine of Mars. Gradually, as the years went on, the little cottage on the Albany road became the undoubted center of mental activity for Northern Hampshire. Around its hearthstone the young men gathered and listened to discussions of the most abstruse problems, not only of war, but of philosophy and pure science. Here space was measured with a line, the trackless star was traced to its hiding place by day, the sun after his going down at night, and a path was predicted for the erratic comet. Some of the results of these hearthstone



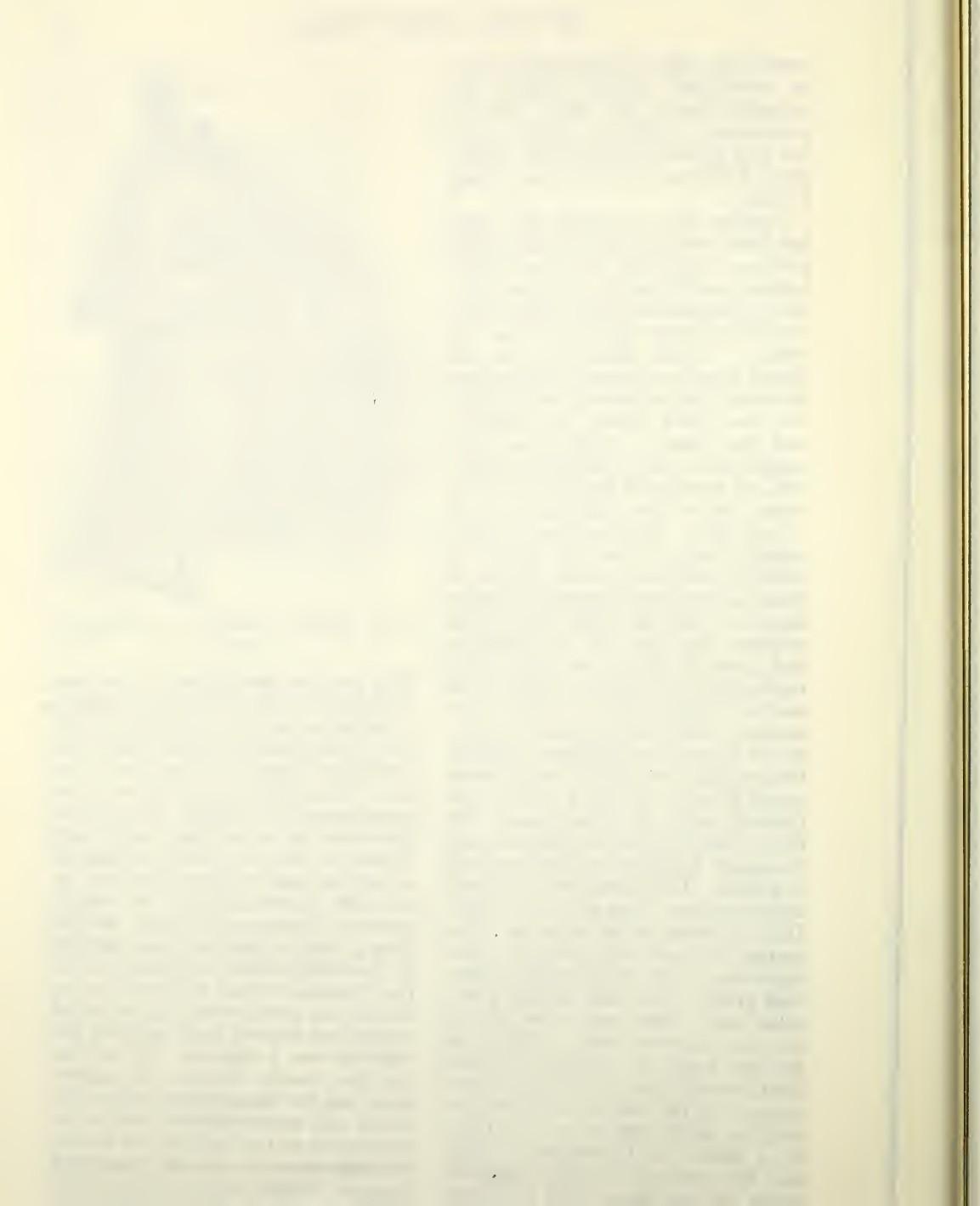
studies are with us in published works on astronomy, military science and colonial history by Hoyt, and on mathematics, biblical criticism, civil law and general literature by Rodolphus Dickinson, one of his young friends.

Another boy of whom the world has heard received here his inspiration and here enjoyed his first laurels. Half a dozen rods from the great east window, Epaphras and Experience could see Mercy, sister of the General and wife of Justin Hitchcock, as she leaned from her pantry window for a morning chat, or busied herself about her back yard chores, her chickens and her geese. Among her two-legged cares was a bright, dark-eyed boy, the torment of her life, who early came under the influence of his "Uncle Ep." As a mere lad he would eagerly listen to the talk round his uncle's hearthstone, and as he grew in years his love for the truths of science kept pace with his hatred of the great usurper Napoleon; for all along he had drunk in the current talk which represented this master of the art of war as a blood-thirsty tyrant, a cruel monster, whose pastime was the murder of women and children. Picture the scene at the cottage on the evening of Monday, March 4, 1805, as the General read the latest news, that three months before, at Notre Dame, Bonaparte had been crowned emperor of France. Did hatred for the French nation prevent even pity for its fate? Did righteous indignation or dread despair for suffering humanity come uppermost in the minds of the assembled group? One year lacking a day, other news came, and to the hearers the tables seemed turned. With what joy they heard the General read from the *Greenfield Gazette* a highly colored account of the success of Alexander and the allied army over the French in a battle of December 2, 1805, and the comments — that "sanguine hopes are now entertained in Europe that Bonaparte has at length arrived at the termination of his career."



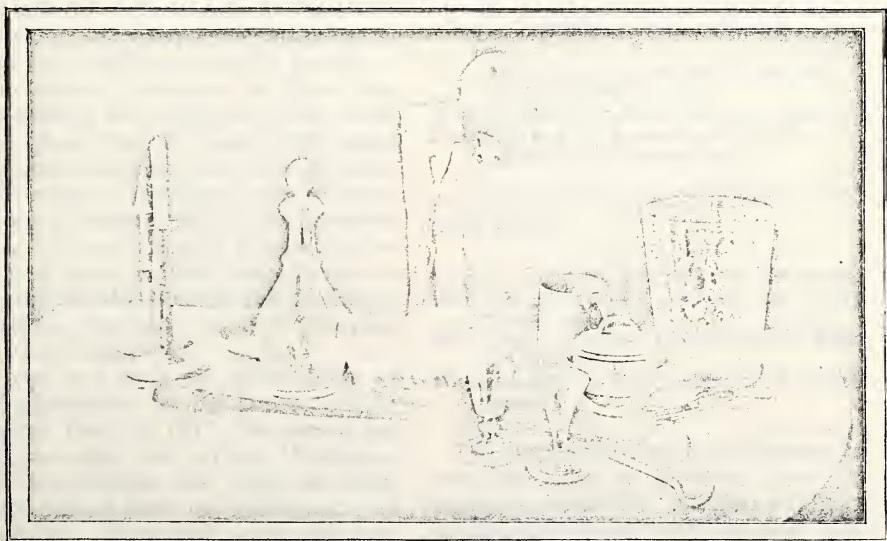
"NOW SILENTLY RESTING IN MEMORIAL HALL."

This was the first report by the way of England of the battle of Austerlitz, a battle in which Napoleon gained one of his greatest victories over the combined armies of Russia and Austria. The fulfilment of these "sanguine hopes" was not yet. More countries were to be overrun, and more thrones to be overturned; thousands of widows and orphans were yet to taste the horrors of war. At length, however, Bonaparte's hour struck. June 3, 1814, a hand-bill was received at Deerfield, which was published in the *Franklin Herald* of June 7, containing the joyful news that the allied armies had entered Paris and that the emperor was a fugitive. We of this day can hardly imagine the excitement and the thanksgiving which followed this announcement; and of all the coterie of the little brown house, not one was more strongly impressed than the "bright, dark-eyed boy," Edward Hitchcock. He at once began his tragedy, "The Downfall of Bona-



parte." In its pages can be seen reflected the sentiment of the time, which ranked Napoleon as the most heartless and cruel despot the sun ever shone upon, and Alexander, the czar of Russia, as the friend of humanity and the prince of peace. It gives us queer notions of our democracy to see the emperor stigmatized in this production as "a mud sprung reptile," "a filthy toad," a "base born Corsican." This tragedy, which covered the leading events of the rise and fall of Napoleon, was put upon the boards and acted by the leading lights of Deerfield in the old meetinghouse, part of the pews being floored over for a stage. This was the event of that generation, and the assumed names of the actors clung to many of them through life. In my boyhood, the names of Blucher and Ney, Lescourt

author and his fellows, as they spouted the lurid lines before the critic in rehearsal for the stage; and the copyist was doubtless often vexed by changes in the text in order to insert some new technical military phrase or let in a little more blood and thunder. How wide a circulation this historic effusion had is not known; but Horace Greeley relates that when an apprentice at Poultney, Vermont, the tragedy was acted there, and he personated one of the characters. In after years, President Hitchcock made efforts to suppress this callow effort of his genius, and copies are scarce in consequence. Under the lead of his uncle, young Hitchcock became an ardent student of astronomy and, making a practical application of his acquirements, constructed the astronomical tables for a series of almanacs



OLD-TIME CHEER.

and Platoff were as familiar as household words.

This tragedy was evidently composed under the eye of General Hoyt, for his ear-marks can be seen on almost every page. The low ceiling of Aunt Spiddy's kitchen must have looked down a hundred times on the

which he published at Deerfield. Some of his problems were questioned by the astronomers of Europe; but with General Hoyt at his back he maintained his ground, and after a sharp contest his positions were at length admitted as proven by the Continental Magnates. Doubtless



the big fireplace echoed the rejoicing which followed this victory of a self-made Deerfield boy over the savants of Europe. And well it might,—for had it not for years been throwing light from its pine knots on these knotty questions?

General Hoyt was a graduate of the Deerfield district school. Edward Hitchcock had in addition a few winter terms at the Deerfield Academy, and this was his Alma Mater. Although professor, and later president of a college, and the recipient of collegiate honors from far and wide, he never saw as a pupil the inside of any college walls, and he may well be called a graduate of the little brown cottage on the old Albany road. Perhaps the honor must be shared with the great elm tree under which it nestled so snugly, with its moss covered roof. It is related that the General and his nephew were in the habit of fleeing, to escape the disturbance from the children and the swash of Aunt Spiddy's mop on the floor, to a seat among the branches of this even then giant tree, to study their most profound problems; and here Edward spent many a studious hour, refusing to join in the pastimes of his companions. Certain it is that the seat in the old tree was a favorite place of resort, not only for the General and the future president, but also for their growing sons and daughters.

Hoyt had such an appreciation of and admiration for the Duke of Wellington, that, in 1811, he named his only son after him, Arthur Wellesley, thus anticipating the fame the Iron Duke gained later at Salamanca and Waterloo. European wars did not, however, wholly engross the attention of Hoyt. He is best known to-day by his "Antiquarian Researches" concerning the Indian wars of New England, a work of great value to students of New England history.

The rise and progress of the events which led to the War of Impressment with England must have been watched with the deepest interest and

discussed in all their bearings under the roof-tree of the Inspector General's cottage. Here would the patriotic citizens gather; here would be first heard the declaration of the war, and here first came the stirring news of our gallant naval victories so unexpected by either of the belligerents; and here, we may be sure, were sung the spirited songs they inspired. The General was not gifted in song, but what he lacked in tone and harmony he made up in energy, and doubtless the rafters shook as he emphasized the sentiment of Chancellor Kilty's variation of "Britannia Rule the Wave."

"For see, *Columbia's* sons arise,
Firm, independent, bold and free;
They too shall seize the glorious prize,
And share the empire of the sea;
Hence then, let *freemen* rule the waves,
And those who yield them still be
slaves;"

or as he joined in Ray's stirring lyric:

"Too long has proud Britannia reigned
The tyrant of the sea,
With guiltless blood her banners stain'd,
Ten thousand by *impressment* chain'd,
Whom God created free;"

or in the rollicking tribute to Commodore Perry:

"Hail to the chief, now in glory advancing,
Who conquered the Britons on Erie's
broad wave;
Who play'd Yankee Doodle to set them
a-dancing,
Then tripp'd up their heels for a watery
grave."

We have seen that the General did not live then, as in later years, in scholastic seclusion. Neither was he an exclusive devotee to science and military art. He was an active man of affairs, with a wide-spread political influence, and was, in fact, one of the river gods. He was post-master and registrar of deeds for Northern Hampshire; and hundreds of pages written by his daughter, Fanny, by the light from the east window are now daily consulted by the public. The little brown cottage was also the

WEDNESDAY MORNING
JULY 10TH 1861

Wrote to Mrs. [unclear] about the
loss of my son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

Wrote to Mr. [unclear] about the
loss of his son.

center of the executive power of the new county of Franklin, for the General was high sheriff. We may trust that when he went in state to open the courts, Aunt Spiddy saw to it that his blue, brass-buttoned coat was scrupulously clean, that his cockade and crimson silk sash were properly arranged, and the hangings of his dress sword were spotless as the sun.

Time changes all things. The philosopher and friend, the student and the guide, the man of science and the man of power departed; and of his kith and kin the only representative left to-day on the old Albany road is a young woman who revels in the quick wit and the flight of imagination which she inherited from an unexpended balance in the large brain of her great grandfather, Epaphras Hoyt.

No greater contrast can be conceived than that between some of the early occupants and those who now for a year and a day make their abode in the little brown house,—Rufus Rice and his fitting mate, Esther. Rufus was a first class representative of the typical Yankee, keen, shrewd and honest in business, droll and witty in words, wise, careful and farsighted in action. He was the founder of the fourpence-ha'penny packet express between Deerfield and Greenfield, which still flourishes under the whip of his grandson, another Rufus. "Express Rice" had small opportunity for book learning in youth; but his judgment was sound, and he came to be much relied upon in business by the manless maiden, the distressed widow, and the skilless professor. One of the latter class, after vain struggle to repair a water conduit, called in Mr. Rice. The following brief conversation illustrates the prominent traits in both the interlocutors:

"I find," says the Professor, "after thoughtful consideration and repeated, carefully conducted experiments with this preparation, that all my attempts are fruitless, and that

the water still continues to exude copiously."

"O, yaas, yaas, fix it so 't 'll allus leak like sixty."

"I am compelled to acquiesce in your decisions; but, Mr. Rice, may I inquire what methods you would recommend to—"

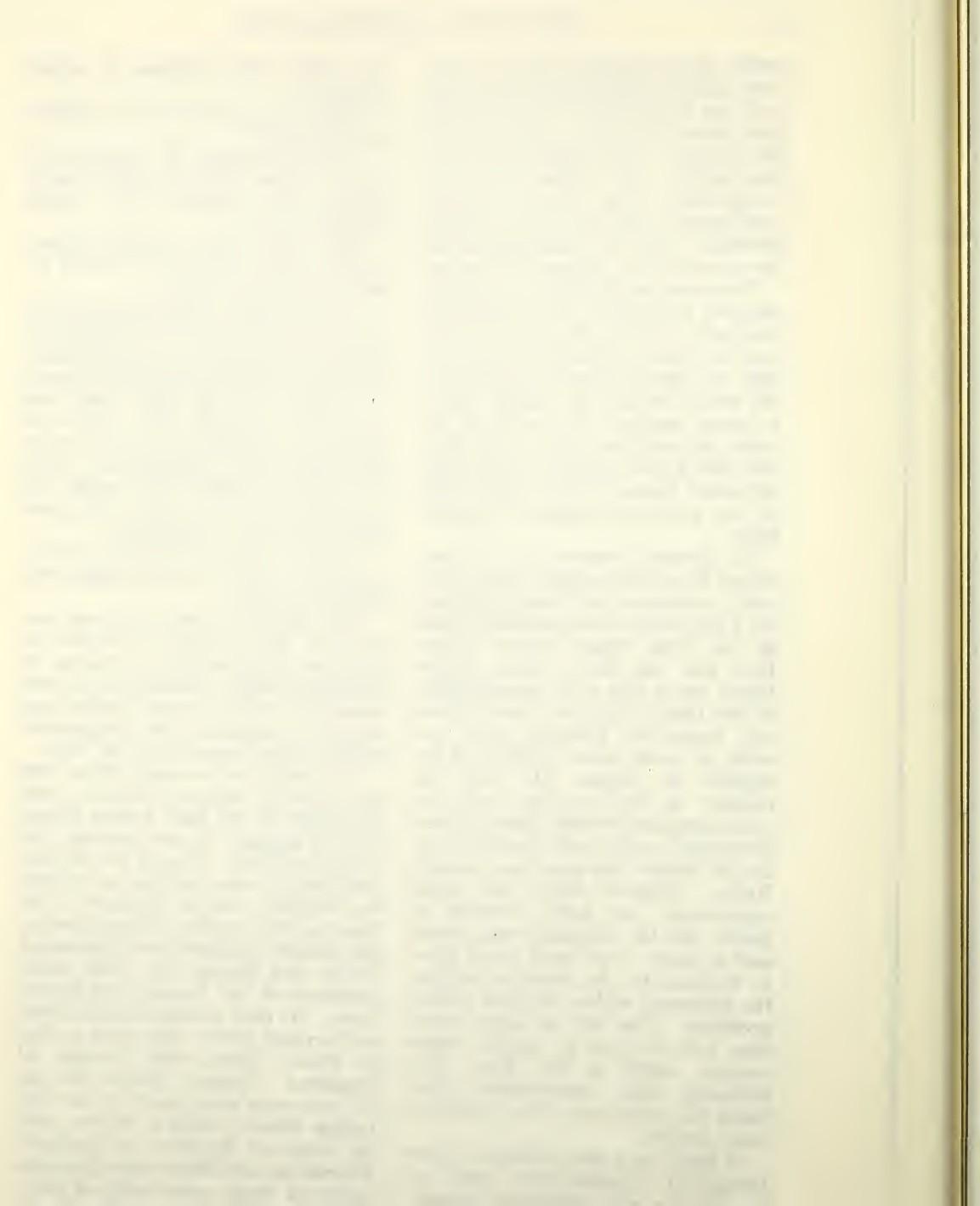
"O, I'll git it fixt as right 's a hoe-handle. Don't you give yourself no more trouble about it."

In sorrowfully condoling with Mr. Rice on the great loss he had sustained in the death of his son, the Professor remarked with his voice full of tears, "I understand, sir, that your son possessed a considerable amount of mechanical ingenuity, that in fact he had proved his constructive talent in practical achievements under adverse circumstances, and with great lack of needful appliances."

"O, yaas! yis, you give Seth a jack-knife and gimlet and he'd make eny most anything."

The sphere of Mr. Rice was narrow; he filled it well. He left no stain on his character or shadow on the little cottage. Neither the hearth-stone, the oven, nor the window had reason to complain in the companionship of these honest everyday folk.

It is said that coming events cast their shadow before. With the next occupants of the little brown house, we will suppose in our musings the case is reversed. One of the fleeting scroll bears a name well known in border warfare, that of Sergeant John Hawks, the hero of Fort Massachusetts, the compeer of Stark and Putnam, of Burke and Rogers and other noted partisans of the French and Indian wars. He died as colonel at his home in Deerfield Street, next door to that of David Hoyt, elder brother of Epaphras. Colonel Hawks in his old age spent much time at the "Old Indian House," then a tavern, with the father of Epaphras as landlord. We may be sure that young Epaphras improved every opportunity of hearing the bar-room stories of this scarred veteran of two wars, that he



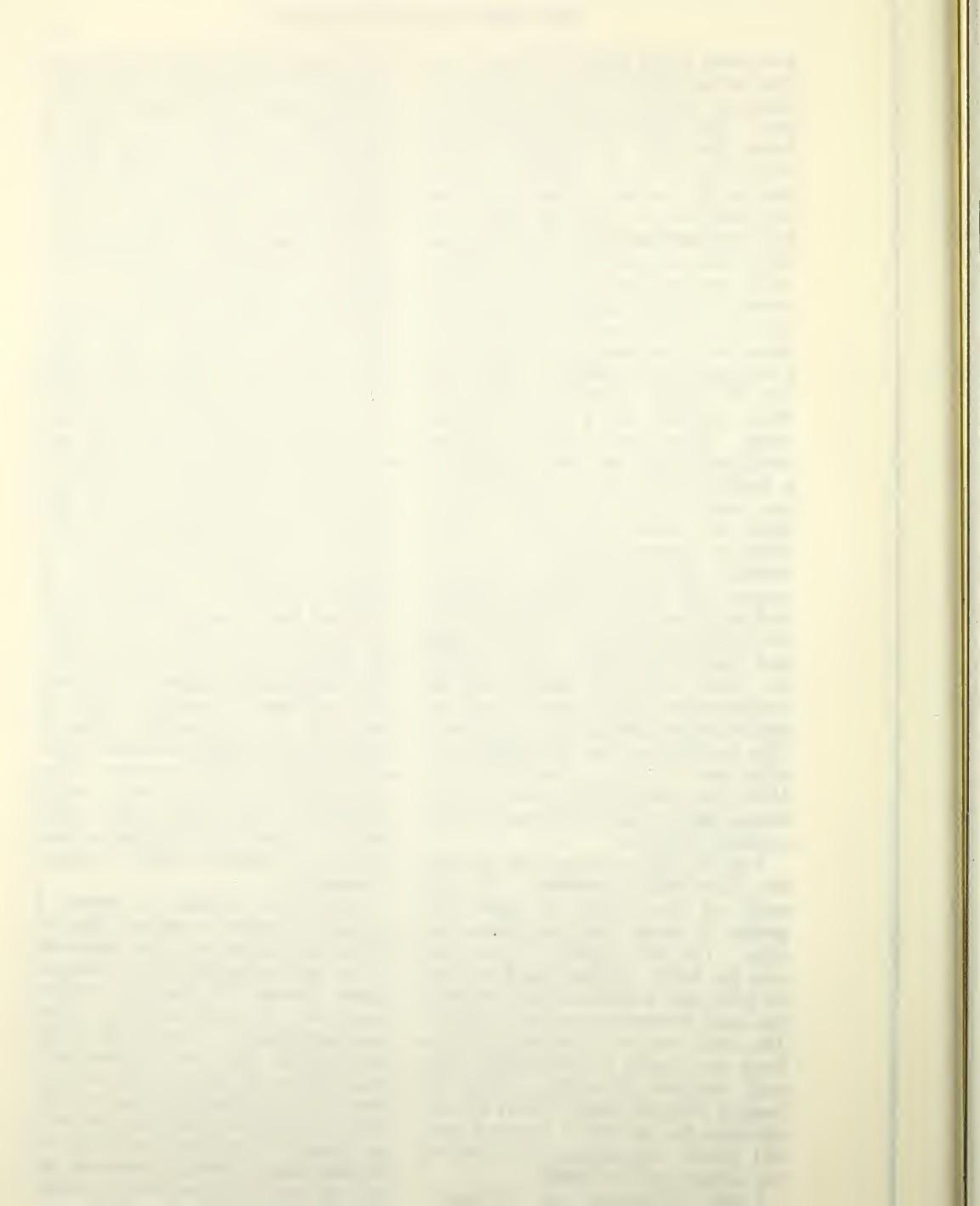
was often at his brother's house, and that he haunted the home of the hero listening eagerly to his door-stone tales. Nor can we doubt that here was born the spirit of research which seized upon the wide awake boy, and that in this primary school he began the study of the "Art of War." In his "Antiquarian Researches" General Hoyt does full justice to the heroism of his aged mentor, and many a vivid scene of Indian warfare therein pictured was doubtless in language heard from one who could say, "All of this I saw and part of which I was;" and the old warrior could have asked no better medium for a history of his deeds. These stories which our three steadfast friends had heard rehearsed a hundred times in the earlier days, the oven, the window and the fireplace now heard repeated to a new circle of listeners, gathered in the old kitchen; for John Hawks, the newcomer, had all these tales by heart, and took due pride in recounting the deeds of his grandsire. But the times had changed; blessed peace flooded the land, and the stories fell on comparatively listless ears. Epaphras and his coterie had no successors here. The hearthstone was no longer presided over by Mars, Clio or Urania. With the passing of the shadow, the heroic days of the little brown house vanished for aye.

But the shifting scene had not left the hearthstone desolate. On the ruins of the temple of Mars, the genius of music now established an altar. The first offering upon this was the babe, Charles, the first born of John and Emily, his wife, who in due time became a devotee of Apollo. He was a teacher of sacred music, a long time leader of the village choir, and, perhaps, through a strain inherited from the hero of Fort Massachusetts, he was also a lover of martial music, organizing and leading the village military band.

Charles Hitchcock, son of Deacon Justin and brother of President Edward, born on the adjacent lot, was

the next occupant of the little brown house, with the additions of his "Aunt Spiddy's porch" and "Aunt Spiddy's bed room." Charles was a man of versatile tastes, with strong salient points in his make-up. His regular occupation was farming, but in common with his "Uncle Ep" he had a taste for local history. He was overflowing with stories and anecdotes relating to former generations of his townspeople which he had accumulated, the greater part of which are now, alas! lost forever. The Antiquary must not be held accountable for the loss of this inside view of the society of old Deerfield, for at the date of Deacon Hitchcock's death he had not been invested with the robes of the "Oldest Inhabitant." He had, however, heard enough from the lips of the Deacon to become aware that here was a rich storehouse of local lore; he had called the attention of Professor James K. Hosmer to the fact, and had arranged for an interview in the little brown house, when Mr. Hosmer was to take down Deacon Hitchcock's stories in writing. This movement proved too late; on the very day appointed, Deacon Hitchcock was called to a bed of sickness from which he never rose. This circumstance is told as a much needed warning to many who might profit by it. There are Hitchcocks and Hosmers of various grades in every community.

Taking the warning to myself, I proceed to make a record, that of all the salient points in the character of the new owner of the little brown house, Deacon Hitchcock's love for music was the most notable. That was unmistakable. To this the oven, the window and the fireplace will cheerfully and unanimously testify. For it was still before the days of the iron stove and tin oven that the singing master entertained at all hours of the day and untimely hours of the night his friend the minister, a musical composer and writer of hymns. Here it was that new theories were



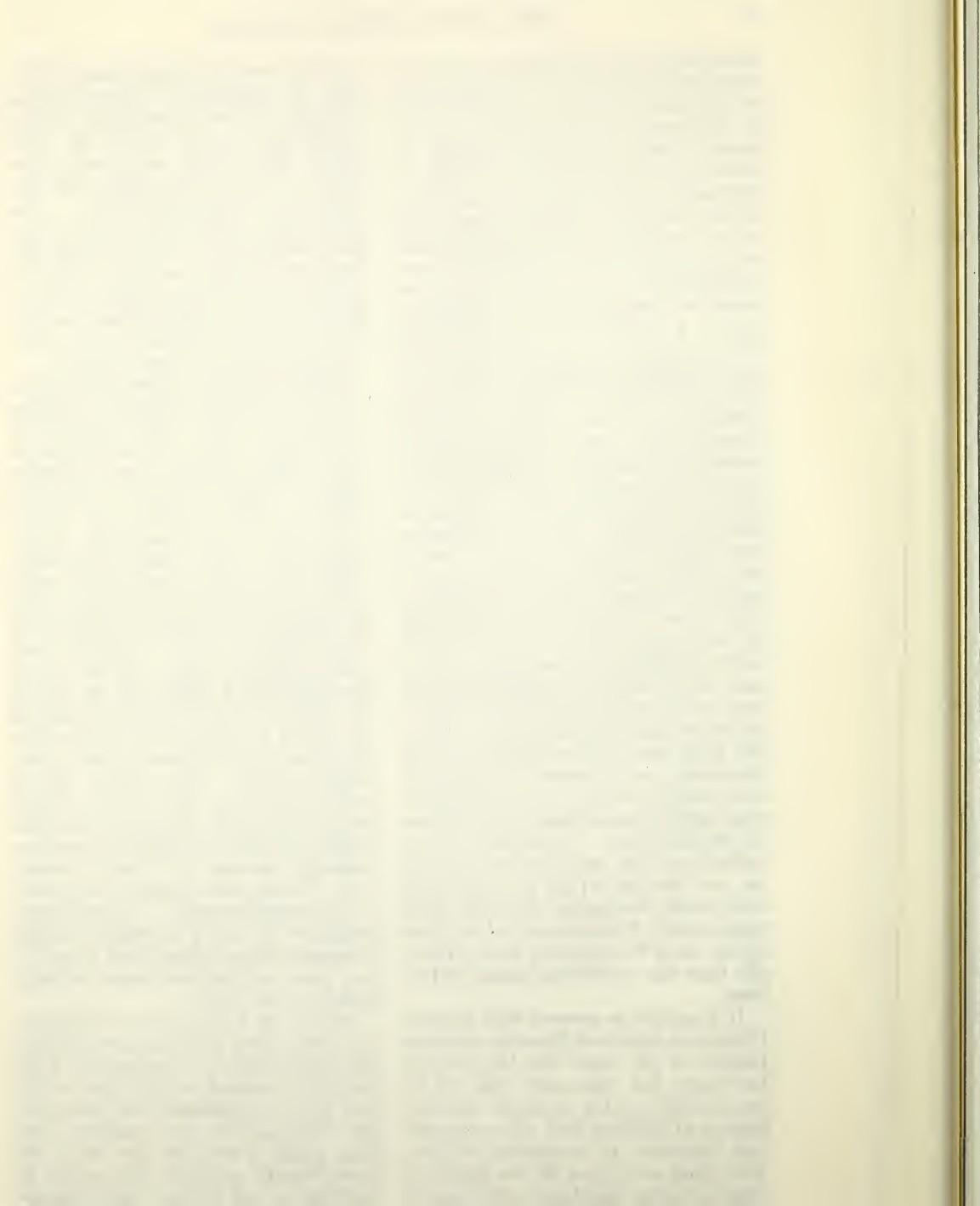
discussed, new combinations of notes tried, and especially new adaptations of language to tunes. The melodies of the sweet singer of Israel were released from the harsh bondage of Sternhold and Hopkins, and made to clothe the more harmonious measures of the minister, while the more lurid verses of the uncompromising Watts were rehashed or banished without compunction to meet the more generous interpretation of the Scriptures under a milder form of theology. The theology being settled, this did not trouble the twain, but to adapt the piety and beauty of Watts to the new conditions and new claims of musical science was a task requiring all the knowledge and all the skill of these earnest enthusiasts; and it was here that the Deerfield Collection of Sacred Music gradually took on substance and form. As the melody of music was in their hearts and voices, so the science of music was upon their lips; they talked earnestly and musefully by the light of the east window, the tallow candle or the pine knot, of octave and compass, of pitch and accent, of chords and triads and cadence, of points and counterpoints, of canons finite and canons infinite, of scale chromatic and diatonic, of sequence and modulation and transformation, even unto the weariness and confusion of the unlearned. Doubtless the big-bellied bass viol, made by Deacon Justin, and the pitch pipe he used, both now silently resting in Memorial Hall, could testify, if summoned, of all these things more fittingly and more musically than the unmusical muser of this hour.

It is natural to assume that Deacon Hitchcock inherited from the amateur builder of the bass viol his love of harmony; but this could not fail to be fostered by the example and influence of William Bull, the composer and publisher of a musical treatise, who lived next door to the house in which Charles was born and brought up. However this may be, when Charles in early manhood became in-

timately associated with Samuel Willard, the unshackled minister of free thought and free expression, a great opportunity was given him for cultivating and refining his strong native talent. The new friendship was harmonious and mutually helpful. The saintly Dr. Willard did not, indeed, dwell beneath this roof, but his hallored voice seems on this occasion to echo from wall and ceiling, conjured up, it may be, by the subdued melody evoked by the skillful touch of his musically inspired granddaughter.

Meanwhile the warm-hearted oven and the cheerful fireplace, ignoring all ancient rivalry, clung together as fast friends under the same mantel-tree, while the great east window smiled serenely on both. Well and faithfully each of the three served in its own way those who understood their secrets and their power. Charles, the singer, had readily made friends with the musical fireplace, but he understood not the mysteries lying in the depths of the oven; they were unfathomable to him. When he had pondered for a time what he should do, he hied away to the hills beyond the valley to the home of the setting sun, even to the house of Isaac, surnamed Baker. Now Isaac had a comely daughter who had aforetime looked with favor upon the itinerant singing master, and after a short responsive wooing the twain became one. There were literally "no cards" for the wedding party. The venerable secretary of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, then a boy of ten, gave out the invitations verbally from door to door.

It was on a birthday of Washington three score and ten years ago, that the friends of Charles and Lois held high festival within these walls, and so was celebrated the advent of the bride and the new mistress, who then began a new life here with our three friends, and with the pantry of Bathsheba and Silence and Experience. These were all glad of her coming, especially the oven, which well



knew that, although no longer a Baker by name, she would continue to practice the art; and from its mouth came abundant proffers of good cheer, and thenceforth it gave Lois loyal and warm-hearted service. The pantry vied with the oven in the welcome. Although its shelves were weighted with pounds of pound cake, piles and piles of pies, dishes of doughnuts, jars of jams and jellies, baskets of bread and biscuits, cakes of cheese, plates of cookies and gingerbread—these long shelves, ranged one above another, their edges newly decked with scalloped paper, laughed cheerily as they displayed their tempting treasures to the opticks and olfactories. Had a vote of approval been then and there taken, it is doubtful whether the *ayes* or the *noses* would have carried it. All these culinary preparations had been made by volunteer friends of the groom under the lead of Aunt Hannah Hoyt, sister of our friend, the General. Being the head of the commissariat, she wore on this occasion, as the insignia of her office, the big gilded epaulettes of the bridegroom. Tallow candles made luminous spots here and there in the darkness. The electricity of that day shone on the faces and was manifest in the spirits and light movements of the guests.

In the glowing hickory coals under the forestick lurked the loggerhead at a red heat. Cool mugs of home-brewed beer, flanked with eggs and sugar, stood hard by, ready to meet the fire fiend in a friendly contest. The result of all the hissing and foaming and spluttering which followed was like that of many heated, wordy combats: each side claimed the victory. In fact, however, the red iron always turned black and retreated under the forestick for reënforcements, while the mug of flip went briskly about, cheered by, and cheering in turn, the company. On this occasion it was flanked by a big tumbler of Santa Cruz toddy, which was passed to old and young.

Singing and playing games, like the

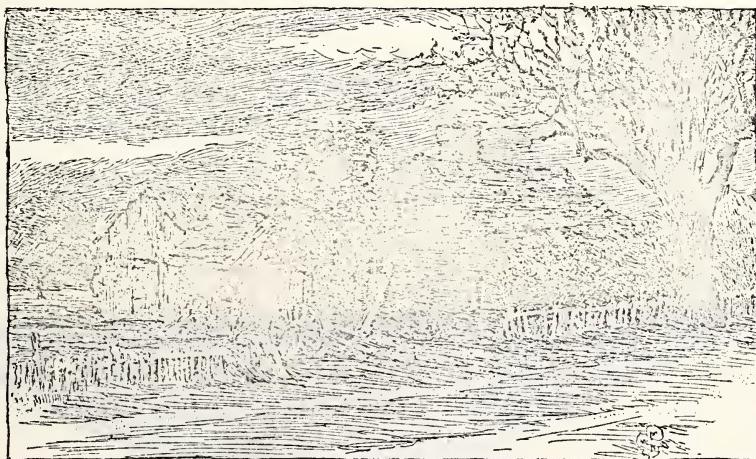
"Needle's eye" or the "Barberry bush," may have been indulged in; but one amusement of wedding parties of the day, "Chasing the bride round the chimney," certainly was not. The oven objected to the game and would not budge; it stood sturdily the whole evening, blocking the only path. It still objects, and still holds its position.

Dancing, which at divers times and places, has been up and down the gamut of public opinion, from the lowest bass, where it was considered the most subtle device of Satan for the ingathering of souls, to the highest pitch of piety, where it ministered to the exaltation of saints,—dancing at this time in Deerfield was ranging among the joyous notes and was at high tide of popular favor; it was an especial accessory to wedding festivity,—and certainly the centennial of Washington's birthday and the wedding day of Charles and Lois was celebrated with the customary decorous hilarity. It is safe to assume that Harry, the brother of Charles, was master of ceremonies in this feature of the entertainment, for he was an ardent disciple of Terpsichore. We hear of one noteworthy occasion when Harry sacrificed his desire for this diversion on the altar of friendship or, perhaps, of friendship and indignation combined. It was the day when the mutual friend of the brothers, the musical minister, had been refused ordination by an adverse Council. Harry, in behalf of the young people, wrote a feeling letter notifying the rejected candidate that in consequence of their sympathy for him at the action of the Council the Ordination Ball arranged for the evening would be given up.

The music furnished to regulate the tripping footsteps on such occasions was usually the sympathetic fiddle,—the young chaps chipping in to hire a fiddler. If none was available, some of the musical ones would set and keep the time by singing, or humming, or calling, or some combination of these methods. The muser recalls

one occasion when as the merest slip of a boy he went with his sister to "a neighbor party" and witnessed what would be called in the slang of to-day a "kitchen shin-dig." The hostess, Mistress Sabrina, inspired and directed the old-fashioned contradances in her long kitchen. Fragments of the sights and sounds still remain with me, impressed, it may be, by a knowledge of the parties, and by seeing the personal application. The director was perched upon the loom at one end of the room, whence her voice rang out with a free and easy swing somewhat like this, with all necessary adaptations:

do not particularize, it cannot be asserted. For the same reason it must be left to the imagination to picture how Captain Hannah beckoned Lois from the bright firelight of the kitchen into Aunt Spiddy's dim little bed room for mysterious conference with certain wise matrons, her new aunts, and how Experience gave her timely words of advice and warning from her ample store of hard earned knowledge, or how Marcy and Betsey and Persis showered upon her maxims of wisdom for her guidance in her new sphere, and how the words of her mentors fell upon the ears of the



"Now cross over my son Stoddard,
tum tum diddle dum, tum tum diddle dum—down outside now my son Amos, tum tum diddle dum, tum tum diddle dum, come to your ma now
'Lisa Ann Parker, you're not big enough, you're not big enough, right and left now Jane Alcesta, tum tum diddle dum, tum tum diddle dum, down in the middle Stoddard Williams, tum tum diddle dum, tum tum diddle dum."

This lady was about the age of Charles, and was doubtless at the wedding, and perhaps her peculiar talent may have been called into requisition; but as this is a tale of verities and the scrolls of the household familiars

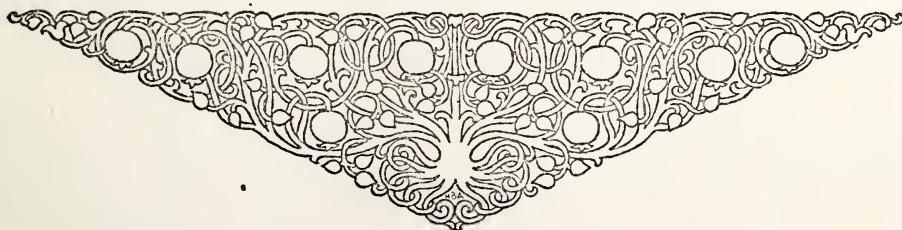
happy and trustful bride with the same abiding effect as water showered upon the back of the proverbial duck.

The year hand on the clock of time crept on. For two-score years Charles the singer and Lois the baker abode together under the roof tree of the little brown cottage, growing browner year by year, and then were gathered to their fathers. Of the two children who first saw the light within these walls, Justin took unto himself a helpmeet and dwelt in a new house hard by, but Harriet remained alone in the old home. Three decades passed. Time was left unmolested to work his will upon the failing habitation and its



forlorn, clouded inmate. Little by little the roof gaped here and there as if to invite the rain, the hail and the snow. The floor of the square room and the pantry of Bathsheba found sad companionship in the dark yawning cellar. Ruin and decay rioted in Aunt Spiddy's bed room. The lingering partitions, black with grime and smoke and festooned with dust-laden cobwebs, faltered and staggered. Still, Harriet with bent form and tot-

tering steps clung steadfastly to the old-time home, all for love of it and for the associations which filled every nook and cranny. All else failing, she crept close to our three old friends for sympathy and cheer, and the staunch fireplace, the tried oven and the great east window proved as true to Harriet as Harriet was true to this taleful relic of by-gone days — the little brown house on the old colonial road to Albany.



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